

Why Reading Matters

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Is reading any different in the 21st Century?

- No just about 'de-coding'
- Not an isolated 'discipline'
- Three-dimensional communications
- Low literacy excludes more than ever



What is 'technacy'?

We are in the age of multi media literacy.
In Scotland, official documentation describes this as:

“The ability to read and write and use numeracy, to handle information, to express ideas and opinions, to make decisions and solve problems, as family members, workers, citizens and lifelong learners.”



Why should reading be a national/political priority?

- Supporting the skills based economy
- Combating social inequality
- Reading is more vital than ever - the information society is the foundation of the knowledge society
- Developing stronger and safer communities, stimulating creativity, Increasing happiness



“literacy is the most basic currency of the
knowledge economy we're living in
today” **

****President Obama : Literacy and education in a 21 Century Economy**



What do businesses want?

- To be more profitable
- To improve the skills of their staff
- To innovate and grow
- To keep good staff happy
- To understand their customers and the market



I should be paid to read!

- Policy analysts consider that literacy rates are a crucial measure of a region's human capital
- It's cheaper to train people who can read for work
- Readers live longer, and are healthier
- Literacy promotes wealth
- – which further promotes literacy



A world without 'technacy' ...

- You cannot participate in any social media
- You cannot drive a car legally
- You cannot take your medicine safely
- You cannot read a bill confidently
- You cannot manage a bank account wisely
- You cannot get a job
- You cannot find your way around a town
- You cannot be an active citizen

Back to basics

You can't do much without it



Profile of a non-reader in the UK

- More likely to live in a non-working household
- Less likely to have children
- More likely to be overcrowded
- Less likely to vote
- More likely to experience divorce, mental illness
- More likely to distrust their community and feel unsafe



What do we call this?

‘The isolated illiterate’

- Now more than ever, life without literacy is bleak
- Can lead to inter-generational illiteracy

BUT

- The negative impact of low literacy is reversible at any stage in life

Literacy changes lives

To read or not to read, 2007, U.S.A

Literacy Changes Lives, 2008, UK

- Overwhelming evidence that literacy has a significant relationship with a person's happiness and success
- Reading *for pleasure* has been identified as the most important indicator of the future success of a child
- Improvements in literacy at any point in a person's life can have a profound impact on their overall circumstances and well-being

low literacy and quality of life in the UK

'Literacy Changes Lives' National Literacy Trust 2008

- 22% of men and 30% of women live in non-working households
- Only 50% are 'satisfied with life so far' compared with 75 – 80% for all other literacy levels
- 41% of employers worry about workforce literacy. Acquisition of level 1 literacy raises the probability of employment by 5%, and for workers, raises wages by about 7%

Not an 'either/or' between 'literacy' and 'reading for pleasure'...

There is an direct relationship between reading
for pleasure,
literacy and success in life.

'To be literate is to **become
liberated**... Literacy makes people
aware of their basic human rights
and **enables them to fight** for
a protect their rights...knowledge
is power.'" **Kassam (1994:33)**



The fuzzy stuff?

- Empathy, connectivity, Self-expression
- Persuasiveness, reflectiveness
- Actually contribute to resilience:
- improved rational behaviour, better emotional balance, independence and control



....without the fuzzy stuff?

- Isolation, lack of connection
- Poor aspiration
- Poor relationships - with authority and with peers
- Antagonistic and defensive view of the world
- Fear and anxiety
- A lack of control



Let's not forget

- Books help us develop vital language skills
- The more you read, the better you get at it
- Being better at reading improves your life chances
- Reading opens up new worlds and enriches lives and can enhance social skills
- Reading improves hand-eye co-ordination
- It's fun!



'good for you - inside and outside'

Essential for education and work

Essential for business

Essential for participation in civic life

Important for your health

Important for your mental
health and well-being

Essential for citizenship

Vital to society



Our reading rights

the right to communicate and be understood;
the right to learn, understand and empathise;
the right to work, and be independent;
the right to understand and secure our rights as
a citizen;
the right to support and encourage our families;
the right to be happy, healthy and secure;
the right to participate, and contribute
to society



A final thought...

- "It is the brain, the little grey cells on which one must rely. One must seek the truth within--not without."

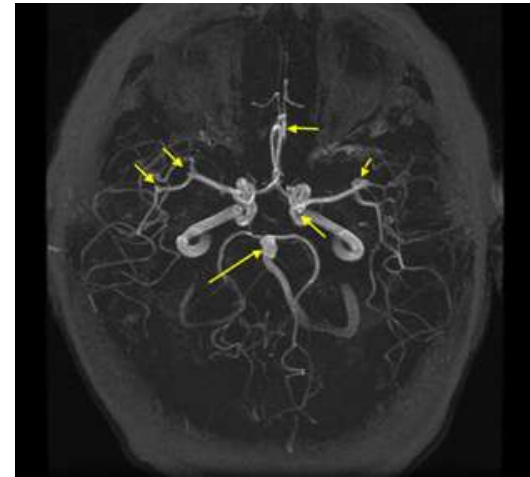
Hercules Poirot, Agatha Christie



Reading breeds natural resistance and excites the brain

- Difficult reading is good for you and LITERALLY exercises the 'little grey cells'
- (verbs and nouns are processed in different parts of the brain – if you confuse them (as Shakespeare often does) it produces a functional shift in the brain – it causes neural excitement!

It appears that Shakespeare can *Literally* change the way we think!



The last word....?

‘How well he's read, to reason against reading!’

William Shakespeare

